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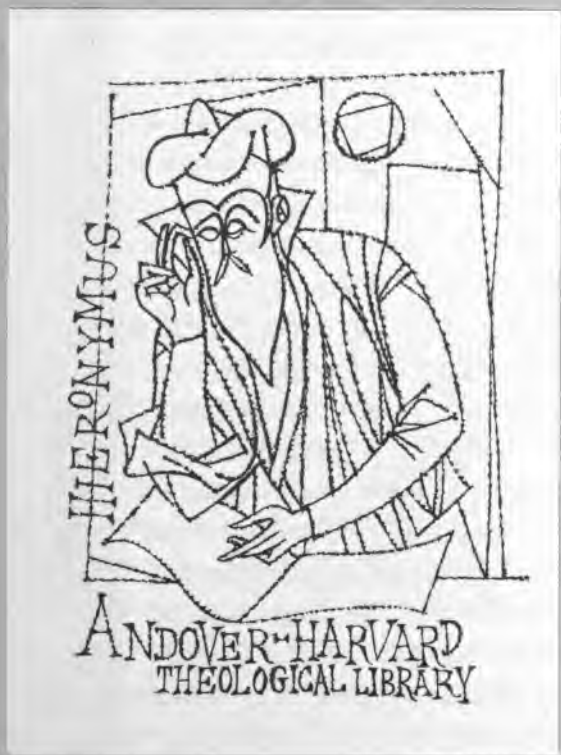
TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY:

AN EXPERIENCE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TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY

TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY

AN EXPERIENCE
With Some Illuminating Letters
Concerning It

BY

MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE
AUTHOR OF "HOME TO HIM'S MUVVER,"
"OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT," ETC

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The interest aroused by the anonymous publication of *Twenty Minutes of Reality* in the columns of *The Atlantic Monthly* has made its re-publication in book form a duty as well as a pleasure. The courteous permission of the proprietors of *The Atlantic Monthly* to use not only *Twenty Minutes of Reality* but three of the letters contributed by its readers on the subject is gratefully acknowledged.

In giving the author's name for the first time, the publishers hope that the reader will remember that the letters were written while the article was still anonymous.

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TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY

TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY

AS a child I was afraid of world without end, of life everlasting. The thought of it used to clutch me at times with a crushing sense of the inevitable, and make me long to run away. But where could one run? If never-ending life were true, then I was already caught fast in it, and it would never end. Perhaps it had never had a beginning. Life everlasting, eternity, forever and ever: these are tremendous words for even a grown person to face; and for a child—if he grasp their significance

at all—they may be hardly short of appalling. The picture that Heaven presented to my mind was of myself, a desperate little atom, dancing in a streak of light around and around and around forever and ever. I do not know what could have suggested such an idea; I only know that I could not think of myself caught there in eternity like a chip in a whirlpool, or say "round again, and round again, and round again" for more than a minute, without hypnotizing myself into a state of sheer terror. Of course, as I grew older I threw off this truly awful conception; yet shorn of its crudeness and looked at with grown-up eyes, there were moments when, much as I believed in, and desired, eternal life, that old feeling of "round again, and

round again" would swoop back upon me with all its unutterable weariness, and no state of bliss that I could imagine seemed to me proof forever against boredom. Nevertheless, I still had faith to believe that eternity and enjoyment of life could in some way be squared, though I did not see how it was to be done. I am glad that I had, for I came at last to a time when faith was justified by sight, and it is of that time that I wish to write here.

If this paper ever chances to be printed, it will be read, I think, by two sets of persons. There will be those who will wonder if I speak of something that is really there, or who will be quite sure that I do not—that I either imagined or made up the whole thing, or else that it was en-

tirely due to the physical condition of convalescence. Others there will be who will believe that I am speaking of the truth that is there, because they, too, have seen it. These last will think that it was not because I was returning to health that I imagined all life as beautiful, but that with the cleared vision that sometimes attends convalescence I "saw into reality," and felt the ecstasy which is always there, but which we are enabled to perceive only on very rare and fleeting occasions.

It is these last for whom I wish to write. If this clearing of the vision is an occasional occurrence of convalescence, then what I saw is of far more value than it would be had my experience been unique.

I do not really know how long the insight lasted. I have said, at a rough guess, twenty minutes. It may have been a little shorter time, it may have been a little longer. But at best it was very transitory.

It happened to me about two years ago, on the day when my bed was first pushed out of doors to the open gallery of the hospital. I was recovering from a surgical operation. I had undergone a certain amount of physical pain, and had suffered for a short time the most acute mental depression which it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. I suppose that this depression was due to physical causes, but at the time it seemed to me that somewhere down there under the anesthetic, in the black abyss

of unconsciousness, I had discovered a terrible secret, and the secret was that there was no God; or if there was one, He was indifferent to all human suffering.

Though I had hardly reëstablished my normal state of faith, still the first acuteness of that depression had faded, and only a scar of fear was left when, several days later, my bed was first wheeled out to the porch. There other patients took their airing and received their visitors; busy internes and nurses came and went, and one could get a glimpse of the sky, with bare gray branches against it, and of the ground, with here and there a patch of melting snow.

It was an ordinary cloudy March day. I am glad to think that it was.

I am glad to remember that there was nothing extraordinary about the weather, nor any unusualness of setting—no flush of spring or beauty of scenery—to induce what I saw. It was, on the contrary, almost a dingy day. The branches were bare and colorless, and the occasional half-melted piles of snow were a forlorn gray rather than white. Colorless little city sparrows flew and chirped in the trees, while human beings, in no way remarkable, passed along the porch.

There was, however, a wind blowing, and if any outside thing intensified the experience, it was the blowing of that wind. In every other respect it was an ordinary commonplace day. Yet here, in this every-

day setting, and entirely unexpectedly (for I had never dreamed of such a thing), my eyes were opened, and for the first time in all my life I caught a glimpse of the ecstatic beauty of reality.

I cannot now recall whether the revelation came suddenly or gradually; I only remember finding myself in the very midst of those wonderful moments, beholding life for the first time in all its young intoxication of loveliness, in its unspeakable joy, beauty, and importance. I cannot say exactly what the mysterious change was. I saw no new thing, but I saw all the usual things in a miraculous new light—in what I believe is their true light. I saw for the first time how wildly beautiful

and joyous, beyond any words of mine to describe, is the whole of life. Every human being moving across that porch, every sparrow that flew, every branch tossing in the wind, was caught in and was a part of the whole mad ecstasy of loveliness, of joy, of importance, of intoxication of life.

It was not that for a few keyed-up moments I *imagined* all existence as beautiful, but that my inner vision was cleared to the truth so that I *saw* the actual loveliness which is always there, but which we so rarely perceive; and I knew that every man, woman, bird, and tree, every living thing before me, was extravagantly beautiful, and extravagantly important. And, as I beheld, my heart melted out of me in a rapture of love

and delight. A nurse was walking past; the wind caught a strand of her hair and blew it out in a momentary gleam of sunshine, and never in my life before had I seen how beautiful beyond all belief is a woman's hair. Nor had I ever guessed how marvelous it is for a human being to walk. As for the internes in their white suits, I had never realized before the whiteness of white linen; but much more than that, I had never so much as dreamed of the mad beauty of young manhood. A little sparrow chirped and flew to a nearby branch, and I honestly believe that only "the morning stars singing together, and the sons of God shouting for joy" can in the least express the ecstasy of a

bird's flight. I cannot express it, but I have seen it.

Once out of all the gray days of my life I have looked into the heart of reality; I have witnessed the truth; I have seen life as it really is—ravishingly, ecstatically, madly beautiful, and filled to overflowing with a wild joy, and a value unspeakable. For those glorified moments I was in love with every living thing before me—the trees in the wind, the little birds flying, the nurses, the internes, the people who came and went. There was nothing that was alive that was not a miracle. Just to be alive was in itself a miracle. My very soul flowed out of me in a great joy.

No one can be as happy as I was and not have it show in some way. A

stranger passing paused by my bed and said, "What are you lying here all alone looking so happy about?" I made some inadequate response as to the pleasure of being out-of-doors and of getting well. How could I explain all the beauty that I was seeing? How could I say that the gray curtain of unreality had swirled away and that I was seeing into the heart of life? It was not an experience for words. It was an emotion, a rapture of the heart.

Besides all the joy and beauty and that curious sense of importance, there was a wonderful feeling of rhythm as well, only it was somehow just beyond the grasp of my mind. I heard no music, yet there was an exquisite sense of time, as though all

life went by to a vast, unseen melody. Everything that moved wove out a little thread of rhythm in this tremendous whole. When a bird flew, it did so because somewhere a note had been struck for it to fly on; or else its flying struck the note; or else again the great Will that is Melody willed that it should fly. When people walked, somewhere they beat out a bit of rhythm that was in harmony with the whole great theme.

Then, the extraordinary importance of everything! Every living creature was intensely alive and intensely beautiful, but it was as well of a marvelous value. Whether this value was in itself or a part of the whole, I could not see; but it seemed as though before my very eyes I ac-

tually beheld the truth of Christ's saying that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of the Father in Heaven. Yet *what* the importance was, I did not grasp. If my heart could have seen just a little further I should have understood. Even now the tips of my thoughts are forever on the verge of grasping it, forever just missing it. I have a curious half-feeling that somewhere, deep inside of myself, I know very well what this importance is, and have always known; but I cannot get it from the depth of myself into my mind, and thence into words. But whatever it is, the importance seemed to be nearer to beauty and joy than to an anxious morality. I had a feeling

that it was in some way different from the importance I had usually attached to life.

It was perhaps as though that great value in every living thing was not so much here and now in ourselves as somewhere else. There is a great significance in every created thing, but the significance is beyond our present grasp. I do not know what it is; I only know that it is there, and that all life is far more valuable than we ever dream of its being. Perhaps the following quotation from Milton may be what I was conscious of:—

> What if earth
> Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
> Each to each other like, more than on earth is thought.

What if here we are only symbols of ourselves, and our real being is somewhere else,—perhaps in the heart of God? Certainly that unspeakable importance had to do with our relationship to the great Whole; but what the relationship was, I could not tell. Was it a relationship of love toward us, or only the delight in creation? But it is hardly likely that a glimpse of a cold Creator could have filled me with such an extravagant joy, or so melted the heart within me. For those fleeting, lovely moments I did indeed, and in truth, love my neighbor as myself. Nay, more: of myself I was hardly conscious, while with my neighbor in every form, from wind-tossed branches and little sparrows flying, up to human beings, I

was madly in love. Is it likely that I could have experienced such love if there were not some such emotion at the heart of Reality? If I did not actually see it, it was not that it was not there, but that I did not see quite far enough.

Perhaps this was because I was still somewhat in the grip of that black doubt which I had experienced, and of which I have spoken. I think it was owing to this doubt also that afterwards I had a certain feeling of distrust. I was afraid that all that beauty might be an uncaring joy. As if, though we were indeed intensely important in some unguessed way to the great Reality, our own small individual sorrows were perhaps not of much moment. I am not sure that I

actually had this feeling, as it is very difficult, after the lapse of almost two years, to recapture in memory all the emotions of so fleeting and so unusual an experience. If I did, however, I comfort myself, as I have said, with the thought of the intense joy that I experienced. The vision of an uncaring Reality would hardly have melted me to such happiness. That the Creator is a loving Creator I believe with all my heart; but this is belief, not sight. What I saw that day was an unspeakable joy and loveliness, and a value to all life beyond anything that we have knowledge of; while in myself I knew a wilder happiness than I have ever before or since experienced.

Moreover, though there was noth-

ing exactly religious in what I saw, the accounts given by people who have passed through religious conversion or illumination come nearer to describing my emotions than anything else that I have come across.

These testimonies I read almost a year after my hospital episode. I came upon them by chance, and was astonished to find that they were describing very much what I had passed through. I think if I had had nothing to match them in my own experience I should almost certainly have felt sure that these people, because of the emotional excitement within themselves, imagined all the beauties that they described. Now I believe that they are describing what is actually there. Nor are poets making

up—as the average mind believes, and as I think I always believed—the extravagant beauty of which they sing. They are telling us of the truth that is there, and which they are occasionally enabled to see.

Here are some of the testimonies offered by people who have experienced illumination in one form or another.

"Natural objects were glorified," one person affirms. "My spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every natural object in the universe." Another says, "When I went into the field to work, the glory of God appeared in all his visible creation. I well remember we reaped oats, and how every straw and beard of the oats seemed, as it were, arrayed

in a kind of rainbow glory, or to glow, if I may so express it, in the glory of God." The father of Rabindranath Tagore thus describes his illumination: "I felt a serenity and joy which I had never experienced before . . . the joy I felt . . . that day overflowed my soul. . . . I could not sleep that night. The reason of my sleeplessness was the ecstasy of soul; as if moonlight had spread itself over my mind for the whole of that night." And when Tagore speaks of his own illumination he says, "It was morning; I was watching the sunrise in Free School Street. A veil was suddenly drawn and everything I saw became luminous. The whole scene was one perfect music; one marvelous rhythm."

(Note his sense of rhythm, of which I was also conscious.) "The houses in the street, the children playing, all seemed part of one luminous whole—inexpressibly glorified." (Perhaps the significance of that tremendous importance which I felt, but failed to grasp, was that we are all parts of a wonderful whole.) "I was full of gladness, full of love for every tiniest thing."

And this was what—in a smaller degree—I, too, saw for those fleeting moments out there upon the hospital porch. Mine was, I think, a sort of accidental clearing of the vision by the rebirth of returning health. I believe that a good many people have experienced the same thing during convalescence. Perhaps this is the

way in which we should all view life if we were born into it grown up. As it is, when we first arrive we are so engaged in the tremendous business of cutting teeth, saying words, and taking steps, that we have no time for, and little consciousness of, outside wonders; and by the time we have the leisure for admiration life has lost for us its first freshness. Convalescence is a sort of grown-up rebirth, enabling us to see life with a fresh eye.

Doubtless almost any intense emotion may open our "inward eye" to the beauty of reality. Falling in love appears to do it for some people. The beauties of nature or the exhilaration of artistic creation does it for others. Probably any high experience may

momentarily stretch our souls up on tiptoe, so that we catch a glimpse of that marvelous beauty which is always there, but which we are not often tall enough to perceive.

Emerson says, "We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision." I believe that religious conversion more often clears the eyes to this beauty of truth than any other experience; and it is possible that had I not still been somewhat under that black cloud of doubt, I should have seen further than I did. Yet what I did see was very good indeed.

The following quotation from Canon Inge may not be entirely out of place in this connection: "Incidentally I may say that the peculiar happiness which accompanies every

glimpse of insight into truth and reality, whether in the scientific, æsthetic, or emotional sphere, seems to me to have a greater apologetic value than has been generally recognized. It is the clearest possible indication that the truth is for us the good, and forms the ground of a reasonable faith that all things, if we could see them as they are, would be found to work together for good to those who love God."

In what I saw there was nothing seemingly of an ethical nature. There were no new rules of conduct revealed by those twenty minutes. Indeed, it seemed as though beauty and joy were more at the heart of Reality than an over-anxious moral-

ity. It was a little as though (to transpose the quotation),

I had slept and dreamed that life was duty,
But waked to find that life was beauty.

Perhaps at such times of illumination there is no need to worry over sin, for one is so transported by the beauty of humanity, and so poured out in love toward every human being, that sin becomes almost impossible.

Perhaps duty may merely point the way. When one arrives at one's destination it would be absurd to go back and reconsult the guide-post. Blindness of heart may be the real sin, and if we could only purify our hearts to behold the beauty that is all about us, sin would vanish away. When Christ says, "Seek ye the Kingdom

of God; and all these things shall be added unto you," He may mean by "all these things" spiritual virtues even more than things temporal, such as what we shall eat, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. It may be that He stood forever conscious of a transcendent beauty, and joy, and love, and that what grieved Him most was mankind's inability to behold what was there before their very eyes.

Perhaps, too, this may be the great difference between the saints and the Puritans. Both are agreed that goodness is the means to the end, but the saints have passed on to the end and entered into the realization, and are happy. (One of the most endearing attributes of saints of a certain type

was—or rather is, for one refuses to believe that saints are all of the past —their childlike gayety, which can proceed only from a happy and trustful heart.) The Puritan, on the other hand, has stuck fast in the means—is still worrying over the guide-posts, and is distrustful and over-anxious.

It is like walking and dancing. One could never dance unless he had first learned to walk, or continue to dance unless walking were always possible; yet if one is too intent upon the fact of walking, dancing becomes impossible. The Puritan walks in a worried morality; the saint dances in the vision of God's love; and doubtless both are right dear in the sight

of the Lord, but the saint is the happiest.

Father Tyrrell says, "For Jesus the moral is not the highest life, but its condition."

Some may object that I preach a dangerous doctrine; others, that I am trying to whip a mad moment of Pagan beauty into line with Christian thought. Possibly I am; yet I am trying not to do the one or the other. I am merely wondering, and endeavoring to get at the truth of something that I saw.

And all the beauty is forever there before us, forever piping to us, and we are forever failing to dance. We could not help but dance if we could see things as they really are. Then we should kiss both hands to Fate

and fling our bodies, hearts, minds, and souls into life with a glorious abandonment, an extravagant, delighted loyalty, knowing that our wildest enthusiasm cannot more than brush the hem of the real beauty and joy and wonder that is always there.

This is how, for me, all fear of eternity has been wiped away. I have had a little taste of bliss, and if Heaven can offer this, no eternity will be too long to enjoy the miracle of existence. But that was not the greatest thing that those twenty minutes revealed, and that did most to end all dread of life everlasting. The great thing was the realization that weariness, and boredom, and questions as to the use of it all, belong entirely to unreality. When

once we wake to Reality—whether we do so here or have to wait for the next life for it,—we shall never be bored, for in Reality there is no such thing.

Chesterton has pointed out the power for endless enjoyment of the same thing which most children possess, and suggested that this is a God-like capacity; that perhaps to God his creation always presents itself with a freshness of delight; that perhaps the rising of the sun this morning was for Him the same ecstatic event that it was upon the first day of its creation. I think it was the truth of this suggestion that I perceived in those twenty minutes of cleared vision, and realized that in the youth of eternity we shall recap-

ture that God-like and child-like attribute which the old age and unreality of Time have temporarily snatched from us.

No; I shall have no more fear of eternity. And even if there were no other life, this life here and now, if we could but open our dull eyes to see it in its truth, is lovely enough to require no far-off Heaven for its justification. Heaven, in all its spring-tide of beauty, is here and now, before our very eyes, surging up to our very feet, lapping against our hearts; but we, alas, know not how to let it in!

Once again, when I was almost recovered, I had another fleeting visitation of this extreme beauty. A friend came into my room dressed for the

opera. I had seen her thus a great number of times before, but for a moment I saw her clothed in all that wild beauty of Reality, and, as before, my heart melted with joy at the sight. But this second occasion was even more transitory than the first, and since then I have had no return. Tagore's illumination, he says, lasted for seven or eight days and Jacob Boehme knew a "Sabbath calm" of the soul that lasted for seven days, during which he was, as it were, inwardly surrounded by a divine light. "The triumph that was then in my soul," he says, "I can neither tell nor describe; I can only liken it to a resurrection from the dead."

And this miraculous time was with him for a whole week, while I have

only tasted it for those few short minutes! But he was a saint, and had really ascended to the holy hill of the Lord through clean hands and a pure heart, while I was swept there momentarily, and, as it were, by accident, through the rebirth of returning health. But when the inspired ones testify to a great joy and a great beauty I, too, can cry, "Yes, I have seen it also! Yes, O Beauty, O Reality, O Mad Joy! I, too, have seen you face to face!" And though I have never again touched the fullness of that ecstatic vision, I know all created things to be of a beauty and value unspeakable, and I shall not fail to pay homage to all the loveliness with which existence overflows. Nor shall I fear to accord to all of

life's experiences, whether sad or gay, as high, as extravagant, and as undismayed a tribute of enthusiasm as I am capable of.

Perhaps some day I shall meet it face to face again. Again the gray veil of unreality will be swirled aside; once more I shall see into Reality. Sometimes still, when the wind is blowing through trees or flowers, I have an eery sense that I am almost in touch with it. The veil was very thin in my garden one day last summer. The wind was blowing there, and I knew that all that beauty and wild young ecstasy at the heart of life was rioting with it through the tossing larkspurs and rose-pink canterbury bells, and bowing with the foxgloves; only I just could not see

it. But it is there—it is always there —and some day I shall meet it again. The vision will clear, the inner eye open, and again all that mad joy will be upon me. Some day—not yet perhaps—but some day!

SOME ILLUMINATING LETTERS CONCERNING "TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY"

SOME ILLUMINATING LETTERS CONCERNING "TWENTY MINUTES OF REALITY"

THE author of the foregoing paper is indebted to the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and to others who wish to remain anonymous, for permission to reprint in the following pages extracts from a few of the many interesting letters which the article evoked at the time of its publication in *The Atlantic*.

The added testimony to, and various explanations of, the experience which these letters offer, seem to the author to be of very real value, not only as serving to affirm the fre-

quency of these fleeting moments of Reality; but also, breaking forth spontaneously, as they do, from men and women of various occupations in all parts of the country, as testifying as well to an eager hunger and thirst after righteousness in many unsuspected hearts, and, in many instances, to a wonderful response of the Spirit to this hunger and thirst.

The frequency of these responses we often little suspect, for the reason that the remembrance of them is generally treasured in silence, until the relation of some similar experience breaks down the barriers of reserve so that they, who also know, must pour forth the gold of their added testimony to what has already been spoken. It is therefore a

pleasure to be able to publish these letters, which affirm so eagerly this constant activity of the Spirit. They are printed here with the sincere hope that the reader may find in them the same quickening of the heart and spiritual stimulation which the author of "Twenty Minutes of Reality" found in their perusal, and for which stimulation grateful appreciation is here tendered.

I

The Unremembered Vision *

The article, "Twenty Minutes of Reality," will, I feel sure, have interested many readers of *The Atlantic*, some of whom, no doubt, can recall

* Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

similar happenings in their own lives. The following short account of a somewhat analogous spiritual experience that I recently went through may be of significance to those whose interest in the subject has already been awakened.

Unlike the writer in the May *Atlantic*, my fears as a child were awakened, not by the thought of life everlasting, but by the thought of everlasting death. I feared personal extinction; feared it at times so acutely that I seemed to realize what it would be to suffer complete disintegration, to feel the very pangs of the snuffing out of the personal entity. I sometimes visioned to myself an immense funnel, fashioned of some unyielding substance of stone or steel,

with, at its bottom, a tiny pin-head of a hole for outlet. Down the steep sides of its converging walls there rolled masses of stone and rock, which at the bottom slowly and inexorably by some unseen power were ground to dust and forced through the minute opening. Sudden terror seized upon me as I thought: "This shall be my fate"; and, though I felt that such obliteration somehow was impossible for my soul, whatever happened to my body, my panic was real. I seemed to dread the emergence of some undreamed-of force or will that in a flash would make the impossible a thing accomplished.

The acuteness of this fear was not of long duration. Thoughts on this subject were of infrequent occurrence

and I soon outgrew such fears entirely, pushed them aside, ignored them, as was only proper for a healthy and much occupied youth. By the time I came to mature faith and belief in the goodness of the universe and the existence of God, I seemed never to have entertained them.

The vision of which I would speak is not properly a vision, rather the effect of what I think must have been one; realization I prefer to call it. This realization was connected with an event that happened but a year ago. It was not so much a part of the event as an aftermath, occurring two days later.

About a year ago I underwent a slight operation that caused me to

stay in bed for only a few hours. I suffered very little discomfort in going under the anesthetic; in fact, few of the physical sensations that I had been told to expect. What occurred to me seemed almost entirely to be within the realm of mind or spirit. After a moment of calm waiting and deep breathing, my mind suddenly reverted to my childhood days and I asked myself, "What if those childish fears were not unfounded?" Then a quick conviction came over me that I was trapped, pinned down helplessly, by an inexorable power; that I had deluded myself through all the years in which I had so carelessly cast aside fear. Reality in all its hideousness seemed hanging over me. A great sound

reached my ears, or rather a mighty vibration smote them with fast-repeated waves, as if the whole adamantine universe were beating in upon my soul some hard, ironic message. There was no power to struggle left in me. I thought, "Hark, God laughs at you!" Then unconsciousness came upon me.

I had little trouble in coming out of the ether, and I was on my feet again and returned home the same afternoon. A few days' rest made me feel as fit as ever. It was while quietly lounging about on the second day that my thoughts reverted to what had just passed. It was then that the realization came over me. It is as vivid to-day.

To my surprise, the past event was

seen in an utterly new light; the experience undergone before the loss of consciousness had lost its grip of terror upon me. Certainty dwelt calmly, assuringly, inevitably in my soul —certainty that the past was past and had not been an approach to death, and that the future could never be torn from out my soul. I knew that not for an instant during the period of utter blankness had I ceased to exist, nay, to be conscious; that my soul had made some tremendous journey whose range and destination my mind could but dimly guess. I was assured that the very adamantine laughter of God had been unable to destroy the entity that was my soul; somehow that mighty beating in upon my consciousness no

longer seemed ironic to me, but filled with the ubiquity and power of ineffable life.

I was not mentally elated or physically excited, but calm in mind and body. I was having no vision. Simply I seemed possessed of the certainty of having had such a vision; rather of having been for a time a conscious part of the ultimate reality, the vision of which was no longer present in my mind. Something had happened in that period of blankness—I know not what. It was as though I had been borne gently up out of some dark abyss, toward which I looked back now without terror, into a realm of mist and moving gray cloud through which I could distinguish immense granite cliffs form-

ing the walls of the pit above whose sun-lit rim I had at last been given a vision of unimaginable beauty; as though, as Dante says, I had seen "un riso dell' universo"; as though it had been vouchsafed me to gaze for an instant into the very eyes of God to receive assurance from his smiling glance.

This certainty of the goodness of the universe has dawned in my soul, though I have no vision to recount as its cause. The strength and quiet peacefulness of its presence have not lessened. I am convinced that during that short period of unconsciousness something of immense import to my soul took place. How could *nothing* have happened?

Thus it was that my childhood fears of non-eternity were effaced.

II

Rock-Ribs of Truth *

Reading the very interesting article in the May *Atlantic* entitled "Twenty Minutes of Reality" inclines me to contribute an experience of my own. It happened more than forty years ago, but the memory of it is still fresh.

My experience differed from that of *The Atlantic* author in that it was distinctly moral in character; in fact it was brought about by wrong-doing. It all happened so many years ago

* Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

that I can now tell the story as if I were speaking of another person.

I believe I am naturally very honest, but at the time I speak of I had been pursuing, for a considerable period, a course that was, to say the least, disingenuous, and thereby I was attaining what seemed to me at the time a great advantage. I was not at peace, however, and all spiritual truth, to which I had previously been keenly sensitive, appeared to me dead and unreal. I used to pray that I might be made to *feel* the reality of it, but no answer came until, after a long time of jangling conflict and inner misery, I one day, *quite quietly and with no conscious effort*, stopped doing the disingenuous thing.

Then the marvel happened. It

was as if a great rubber band which had been stretched almost to the breaking point were suddenly released and snapped back to its normal condition. Heaven and earth were changed for me. Everything was glorious because of its relation to some great central life—nothing seemed to matter but that life. While the experience lasted—and I think it must have been some time, as I remember it both in the house and out—I could have gone cheerfully to the stake. I walked on air, so gloriously commissioned did I feel by some higher power. Even the details of daily living, such as tying one's shoestrings, or brushing one's teeth, which had previously almost suffocated me by their monotony, be-

came of thrilling interest as fitting me for the work I was to do. Reality was shown to me in answer to my prayer. I *saw*, as plainly as I see the city chimneys from my window as I write, great shoulders of Truth and Righteousness reaching down underneath all material things like the rock-ribs of a mountain-side beneath the shifting clouds and shadows. I saw that all material things are but clouds and shadows in comparison. Hence I have never doubted what *Reality* is.

The only other unusual experience that has come to me had no moral bearing whatever.

One day, for no reason that I can trace, in looking at a perfectly familiar mountain-side, I became for a few

minutes poignantly conscious of the *life* of the mountain—life of beast, bird, insect, sap in trees, thrill of the earth; the whole mountain, and all it held, seemed to sing and quiver with life.

In a few minutes it was only an ordinary mountain again, thick-set with trees and holding its secret, but *I* was a little different—at least, I hope so.

III

The Permanent Ecstatic *

What is wrong with my psychology? Why does one very gifted person, with a pen to express what he feels, receive as a *vision* the psychic

* Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly.*

experience of joy and the inner conviction that Good is at the bottom of everything which another very ungifted person, with no power of self-expression, has felt with more or less intensity — generally more — ever since her first conscious awakening of thought; but which, until she read "Twenty Minutes of Reality," she always regarded as merely the normal mental attitude of the normal human being?

As I read this very beautifully written article I said, "Of course." "Why, naturally," "Of course," at the ending of so many paragraphs that, at last, I found myself gasping in amazement that any living man or woman should have thought an experience of *twenty minutes* of reality

a thing of sufficient import to write about—it almost took my breath away. But I'm glad they did. For I have been imprisoned in egoism. All my life long (I am forty-four years old), from the age of five years when I danced madly around the first Christmas tree I can remember, shouting "Joy, Joy, Joy!" I've known *more* than twenty minutes of this unveiled naked reality every humdrum day I've lived—and, up to now, I supposed I was just like everybody else, and that everybody else was like me, excepting misanthropes, valetudinarians, Standard Oil magnates, vivisectionists, and kings who, of course, we all know were born blind.

I supposed every normal person

heard this undertone of Joy—this unseen *but always felt* Reality of things, beating and throbbing underneath the horrible and sad, underneath even the monotonous and dull (which is worse than the horrible because less impressive and intense).

I am a very ordinary woman, living a very ordinary life, my days (the bulk of them, at least) given up to housework — tending my furnace, cooking, dusting, washing dishes; but somehow these duties are never really gray; in the heart of them there's always a glow.

Whenever I tend my furnace I feel a thrill of wonder as I think of the shiny black coal coming out of this miraculous earth, and of the brave, toiling lives of sturdy men that have

been spent and sacrificed down in the mines to dig out that very coal so that I *can* tend my furnace. I really love my coalbin (except when I see it lowering!) for I always feel as though it brought me so close to a big Reality—close to God and close to man. It's like a tremendous link. The Beauty of things I don't find quite so poignant when I'm washing dishes, though there is always a bird warbling in the lilac bush outside my kitchen window or a streak of sunlight on the vines to make me feel the glad wild joy at the heart of life —and did it not sound like too great a silliness, I could truthfully say that I have given way, day after day, to an ecstasy of wonder at the fresh clean water in my dishpan, and have

stood, like a gaping idiot, sometimes for several moments, gaping at it as though it were Niagara Falls—and so it is, only a "little less." From the eternal mystery of the stars down to my very dishpan it's all so thrilling, so outside of ourselves, so God-put-together, that there never has been, to me, any "commonplace." The rain pattering on my roof always makes something warm swish around in my heart just as it does when I hear Schumann-Heink; it seems perfectly unescapable, this endless consciousness of Joy and Beauty. As to Eternity it's always made me chuckle. I've always counted on an æon with Walt Whitman and John Muir, several æons with Balzac, Dostoievsky, and Burns,

the evenings of æons with *The Atlantic*, the mornings with Seveik's Violin Finger Exercises, and no charitable organizations anywhere to interfere with the wholesome joy of selfishness and to make one feel elately dutiful and Righteous. Eternity is only fair.

IV

Another Ecstatic

I read with deep interest the unsigned article in the May *Atlantic*—"Twenty Minutes of Reality"—and Dr. Cabot's comments upon it.

It was the first and only time in my life that I had seen an expression of the sense of the world's beauty as I

have felt it all my life. Not, of course, incessantly, but for such long periods and so frequently that the attitude of other people towards life and the world has always been a source of surprise and puzzle to me. Dr. Cabot's article also was of interest as casting a possible light of solution upon my own point of view; my eyesight, hearing, and sense of smell having proved to be, upon a recent medical examination, of peculiar vividness. I had always supposed that other people saw, heard, and smelled as I did.

V

From an Old Scrapbook*

The experience of your anonymous contributor, as told in the May *Atlantic*, is singular but not unique. From a scrapbook of the war days of 1861 I extract the subjoined stanza of a poem in which the writer tells how he approached the Infinite. No name is given; it is but the vagrant verse from the poets' corner of a country newspaper; but it is of a quality that makes it live ever after in the memory of the reader.

Only sometimes we lie,
Where autumn sunshine streams like purple wine

* Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Through dusky branches, gazing on the sky;
And shadowy dreams divine,
Our troubled hearts invest,
With the faint fantasy of utter rest—
And for one moment we
Hear the long wave-roll of the infinite sea.

VI

Knows What Would Have Been Seen

Without breaking a confidence, can you send me the name and address of "Anonymous" writer of "Twenty Minutes of Reality"?

I appreciate the article very much and would like to write to him.

On Aug. 15, 1909, at 10:30 in the morning, I had the same experience that he did, but not just in the same

way. I saw nothing as he did, and experienced no "feeling of rhythm," but I was absolutely overwhelmed with that "something," and filled with happiness and joy unspeakable, and so unexpected, just as it was with him.

In other words, I was conscious in my physical being of that something. I can say without boasting or presumption I *know* without a shadow of a doubt what that something was and is. He says he almost saw it. Quoting, "If I did not actually see it, it was not that it was not there, but that I did not see quite far enough." Very humbly, yet very confidently, I say, I *know* what he would have seen if he could have seen a little further. I have never seen it, but I have been

conscious of it and I *know* what he would have seen.

VII

An Artist's Testimony

I had not read far, not farther than the word, "I cannot now recall whether the revelation came suddenly or gradually" when my heart seemed to stop still, and so strong an excitement took possession of me in anticipation of what was coming that I could not read the rest of the article with any degree of calmness. It was the second time this winter that I had the joy of realizing that I was not alone in this experience.

It was in the summer of 1910 that

this wonderful thing happened to me. All I can now remember telling you in regard to the experience was that it had suddenly flashed upon me that each individual had a distinct and separate personality and that therefore each was of such tremendous importance. Of course my attempt to convey what I had experienced was entirely inadequate—I did not myself know.

That I had seen Truth pass by and had touched the hem of her garment, this I then felt and now thoroughly believe.

That exuberant joy and that "Sabbath calm of the soul"; that walking on air, that entire unconsciousness or rather losing of self into everything; that seeing into the core

of things all outward trappings falling away; that tremendous importance of each individual; and above all that inexpressible illumination; all verify the identical experience with that mentioned in *The Atlantic* article. The one word "illumination" seems to be the indispensable one in explaining this condition.

It has the Rembrandt quality. Whereas he threw this light on just one part of his picture making, that part vital leaving the rest in darkness, this light illumined everything and everybody, leaving nothing in darkness. It was the Rembrandt quality a thousandfold intensified.

If at the time any one had asked me how long this state of affairs had lasted I should have said two weeks,

but upon reading of the shortness of duration recounted by others, I fear it seemed longer to me than it actually was. I can remember, however, that morning after morning I arose with this same joyous serenity in my soul and that vital interest in humanity, the entire forgetfulness of self and the wonderful light everywhere. I also remember this incident of that time: One of the ladies coming up to me one day as I was idly watching the people, said, "Do you write?" When I replied in the negative, she said, "You seem so intensely interested in everything these days and yet so absolutely detached." It was rather strange, as I recall, that I was seized with a desire to write at that time and upon two occasions did

so, taking as material the people about me—the writing seemed to come spontaneously almost without taking thought.

Since that time I have endeavored to explain the experience only twice. Naturally one fears to meet skepticism about what to us is more precious than much fine gold. On the faces of those to whom I did attempt to explain I saw written sympathy and an earnest endeavor to understand, but I realized again the utter helplessness of trying to convey to them any conception of the wonder and joy which possessed me.

So I said no more, wondering whether every one who was in constant perfect health enjoyed this con-

dition or whether I alone, so to speak, was "queer."

Then came Edward Carpenter. February last I was reading his "Days with Walt Whitman" when I suddenly held my breath and eagerly devoured the pages, and then I became still with a dawning wonder.

First doubt, then wonder and joy seized me to find that what I had treasured as an experience possibly peculiar to me alone, was shared by others. I was abashed to think that I could have had an experience akin to that which so immense a genius as Walt Whitman had, but when I read further that it was not uncommon to ordinary folk I felt relieved —although all the time in my heart

of hearts I knew the experience was the same, in kind if not in degree.

I thought that if life was to be like this, then surely I had been dead all the time — prison bars had been broken, and at last all fetters, mental and physical, had fallen from me. I was free at last—I saw no longer but face to face.

I have found that since that memorable summer the revelation of another bit of the Truth always brings with it a forgetting of self, and intense interest in all about me and a wonder that any one ever could be bored—and an *unshakable serenity*. This experience came for the second or third time last March. No one could have been more astonished than I when I realized that the condition

had gone—left me without my being at all aware of it. I did not realize it as unusual while experiencing it and thought it would be my constant state from that time on.

VIII

From a Literary Man

I was immensely interested in "Twenty Minutes of Reality," with its wonderful perception, for the moment, of "how wildly beautiful and joyous is the whole of life." The vision of actuality thus revealed confirms what for me has long seemed a great truth: that life in its divine reality, whose consciousness we each and all must ultimately share, in-

cludes in its ecstatic joy all aspects of existence. Hence a normal part of it must be the dark sides as well: the pain, the suffering, the conflict, the sinning, the sorrow, all the tragedy; the evil aspects the shadows, while the good are the high lights—but all essential to the whole—all "a part of the whole mad ecstasy" with which all being pulsates. Could we view life with sufficient detachment, apart from our petty personalities, we might perceive this.

I remember two occasions, at least, when external harmonies seemed to strike the corresponding chord within me that for a few minutes aroused the sense of cosmic consciousness, of the universal ecstasy of being.

Do you know "Light on the

Path"? For me it is one of the great revelations of inspired literature. It has a passage so in accord with that article's vision of the Divine Ecstasy that I must quote it:

"Listen to the song of life.

"Store in your memory the melody you hear.

"Learn from it the lesson of harmony . . .

"Only fragments of the great song come to your ears while yet you are but man. But if you listen to it, remember it faithfully, so that none which has reached you is lost, and endeavor to learn from it the meaning of the mystery which surrounds you. In time you will need no teacher. For as the individual has voice, so has that in which the indi-

vidual exists. Life itself has speech and is never silent. And its utterance is not, as you that are deaf may suppose, a cry: it is a song. Learn from it that you are part of the harmony; learn from it to obey the laws of the harmony."

IX

Thinks It Was Cosmic Consciousness

I can give full credence to your experience, for I have felt something of that state of consciousness many times, and in a lesser degree all the time. Subconsciously I do feel it all the time, although my outer mind must be often occupied with the things of everyday life. Sometimes

I can walk along the street amid the noise and din and confusion of a great city, and yet to me that is merely a dream; the reality is the sureness and the grandeur and the glory of Life, the inexpressible love of God, and the sublime order of creation.

I once knew a young woman who attained suddenly to some such a condition and went for about ten weeks of such marvelous happiness that she could hardly speak of it; and once she saw twenty angels and was distinctly conscious of having spent two hours in their company.

What you had, it seems to me, was a glimpse of what is called the "Cosmic Consciousness." There is a big book in the libraries of that title, which describes the experiences of

about thirty persons who had more or less of that consciousness of the universal.

Many parts of Swedenborg's writings show what a wealth of insight is possible to the human consciousness.

For many years I have read everything I could find that in any way paralleled my own experience in that permanent joy-giving view of the Universe, and can assure you that other human beings have shared your own joyful view, and to many it becomes not merely "Twenty Minutes of Reality" but "*the* Reality."

I am convinced that this state of consciousness is the proper heritage of "Whosoever will" receive it in God's way, and think enough in terms of

the universal purpose and plan to become acclimated to things celestial. I feel sure that there are certain laws of mental development whereby almost any person who will faithfully follow them can so greatly enlarge his concept of life that it will be like a chicken stepping from its shell into the sunlight and the world beautiful.

As to the methods available for developing cosmic consciousness I know of nothing that can for a moment compare with silent prayer. Studies along advanced lines and a search for the Truth wherever found are helpful in giving one a clearer concept of what to pray for and how to pray. But union with God is the end and

aim of it all, and includes all that can be desired.

Prayer alone will not take the place of action in response to what prayer has revealed as the right thing to do. Unquestioned obedience to the intuitions, cutting loose from all merely human policies that would compete with intuition for your decision, these are important steps. Seeking the intellectual confirmation of things received intuitively also gives a balance to the thought and a solidity to one's perceptions. One can go just about so far by intuition and then the rest of the mind must catch up. Happy is the man who knows how to develop all his faculties equally and keep them abreast in the upward march. Though you

climb the mountains, if you leave something essential in the valley, you will some day have to come back and get it. On your upward journey take with you all you shall ever need.

Prayer is the basic instinct of being —the creature renewing his life at its Source. From this fountain of life all other instincts and faculties are vivified. Every "drop" of life that refreshes the extremities first flowed in through the one great channel which connects us with God.

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest Commandment, he chose the First, and elaborated it, saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind, and all thy heart, and all thy soul, and thy neighbor as thyself." And He said, "On these

two commandments hang all the Law and the Gospel."

All means every part of. All the mind means every faculty of the mind, such as the Memory, the Reason, the Imagination, the Intuition. All the heart means the Love, the Obedience, the Response, the Will, the Emotion, the Purpose, the Motives, the Belief (that is, what one admits to himself is true). All the soul includes a complete adjustment of the soul to God's laws; it includes repentance, confession, obedience, consecration, sanctification, and eternal surrender to the will of God.

Everything contained in the memory must be brought to light and laid on the altar of God; He must be al-

lowed to transform it into an instrument of use by reinterpretation. Just as a reformed "white slaver" consecrates his personal knowledge of the ways of the underworld to the task of redeeming those that are still in the vortex. Every impression, good or bad, ever made on the memory, can be made useful when God is the User. Hence to worship God with all the mind includes the memory and all it contains. Hence the necessity that the individual should pass through a period when all the memory contains is brought up and laid on the altar.

In a like manner must the Reason be cleansed of all its false reasonings, and filled with true reasonings,

the false, transformed, giving point to the new, and true.

So also must the Imagination be redeemed, reformed, and made an instrument of God, and able to take its place in the worship of God, and be forever the forerunner of experiences yet to be, and the handler of things not present. It is through the Imagination that man's mind comprehends the cosmos. Imagination is the creative faculty. The image of the Creator must be creative. The Universe exists in the Imagination of God. Our Universe exists in our Imagination, that is, as much of the Universe as is ours is what the Imagination can encompass. Hence the importance of expanding the capacity of the Imagination.

You can in like manner amplify every faculty of mind, heart and soul, and by developing each (through prayer and obedience) you develop more and more all the faculties whereby you may come into closer touch with the Great Reality.

X

From a Musical Point of View

. . . The experience so well portrayed is not an unusual one or in any degree occult and certainly not confined to "convalescents." It is simply the language of art and of music—it is nature-language pure, primitive and spontaneous. That the experience lasted only twenty min-

utes is quite natural for any of us who follow conventional pursuits — in fact a shorter interval, a mere glimpse of the "reality" between the acts of the "play," is all that is vouchsafed to many of us—and yet the vision once seen can never be forgotten and the experience once realized cries out for repetition.

Can any one doubt that the state of mind described by the writer was quite that of the great Beethoven as he wandered alone in the fields and forests and heard those heavenly harmonies of nature which, by reason of his genius, he was able to translate into Symphonies and Sonatas? The rippling brook, the singing bird, the rustle of the leaves and the call of the peasant were all harmonized with

the thousand and one other sounds and visions of nature as it is and transcribed by him for man to use as a medium of communing with our great stranger-mother and of more quickly getting in touch with the eternal verities of the great on-rushing Universe which smiles alike at the buzzing bee and the blood-soaked man in the trenches, which is unshocked alike by the abattoirs of Chicago and the battlefields of Europe, which is serene though trembling with passion, and ever ready to lift into rapture any of its children who will dress themselves in a proper mental garb for an audience with her. But it is by no means necessary to don a musical "garb" for an audience. One has only to read a few pages of

Walt Whitman, for example, to feel himself allied with the birds and the winds and the steel mills and the sounds of the ocean. One has only to contemplate a great painting to have the fact brought home to him that all life is harmony and joy and peace and progress. One has only to walk alone, or with a really sympathetic companion, in the deep woods and permit nature's sounds to penetrate his being to feel that he is a part of it all—just as the leaf on the tree or the bird on the branch—and that the worries and cares and responsibilities of life are due to modern man-made conventions and are not in keeping with nature's laws, which were framed only for happiness, health, life and love.

These conditions of mind which our writer calls "illuminations" cannot, of course, be controlled by the will and can only occur when conditions are ideally favorable; and yet they can be courted by putting one's self in position to receive them. They come when least expected and disappear as suddenly. No truly great art or music or poetry or even philosophy, was ever given to the world except through the medium of that greater vision, which enables one to see above and beyond the conventions of civilization into the everlasting Realities. Indeed it may be that genius is simply the prolongation or long-continuing of that superior and detached vision or "illumination." On the other hand any sensitive soul, possessed

with even a spark of idealism or imagination, can have and does have, even though it may be at very rare intervals, a fleeting glimpse, a passing vision, an "illumination," which shows him the surpassing beauty of life, the divine harmony and joy and unity of nature.

XI

From a Man of Wide Reading and Much Deep Thinking

You ask me to describe my own experience. I had not intended to say much about it, but in answer to your direct request I cannot do otherwise than state it as clearly as I can. I feel that these things are not altogether private property, but

are data for settling questions of such large significance that where confidences will not be misused one must say what he can. Such experiences as I have had I should group in three classes, first, the single experience by which I regained my religious faith; second, a group of experiences two or three years subsequent to that and later, connected with the belief I came to adopt, that communication was possible with those who had passed from this life. Some of these latter experiences were almost, if not quite, as intense as the first named. Third, the experience of quiet, gradual development of insight into spiritual things going on steadily from day to day. Of the three, I think it is the third I value most. It was of

the first you asked. My early life was spent under my mother's influence, which was concentrated upon religious things to an unusual degree. I knew nothing of critical thought. When I became acquainted with the latter I found myself gradually driven in thought from position after position that I had previously held, till I was practically agnostic. I left the ministry for teaching. A considerable period of years followed filled with frequent discouragement. My health was weak, and my early life, in which I was largely cut off from the thoughts and interests and activities that put one in touch with the mass of mankind around him, left me in a position where adjustment to life and conduct of my classes was

accompanied with intense nervous strain. Many and many a time I have lain down to rest when it seemed to me the only thought that gave me any pleasure was to count over in various ways the number of years till I should probably be dead. I thought from time to time on religious subjects, but I seemed merely to go over and over again the same arguments which led to no new results. Like Omar Khayyam I went out at the same door by which I had come in. I remember definitely forecasting my probable future belief and saying to myself that I should probably never change my position, for it was unlikely that any essentially new argument would come to me, and the old ones I had thought over and over

till they were unlikely to yield to me any new light. At best it might be a slight shifting of estimate of probabilities.

There came in the spring of 1909 an experience I should never have considered possible for me before. A comparatively trivial matter suggested to me the possibility that one of my chief difficulties in the way of belief might be met in a certain manner. The question arose in my mind, what if after all the belief I had held before might be true? I knelt down by the side of my bed with that verse from Revelations in my mind, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me,"

and I prayed that if those things were really true God would show them to me and make them real to me. There followed an emotional experience so intense that for a long time afterwards I could not even speak of it without breaking down. The reality of religious truth seemed to be made so vitally living to me that I could not doubt it. The conviction was of an entirely different order from the intellectual weighing of arguments I had known before. I went from this experience and out to my ordinary occupations in the world, and I found that the conviction I had gained gradually faded away and doubts arose. As I later lay on my bed resting I reasoned the thing out with myself. I felt just three courses lay

open to me. First, to rely on mere reason. But the world had followed that course and is at variance as to the result still; I also had followed it without result. Second, to say I would take my stand by force of will on the conviction brought to me before. But if one did that he would condemn himself to permanent rigidity of thought. There was just a third possibility. If religious faith was really justified and God wanted us to know Him He must reveal Himself and make Himself real to me as was the case before. I felt this was the only course to take, and I waited, looking up to God. By and by the conviction came again (more quietly, however). There followed a considerable period of fluctuations

of this sort. I would go into the ordinary world, and be distracted by its varied objects, and my conviction would grow dim. I would come back home and wait, holding my heart open to God. Before long the conviction would return. Soon I came to rely upon it as a sure law, just as one who floats throws himself in confidence back on the water. By and by, however, I found the conviction stayed with me permanently, and it has remained with me from that day to this.

It seems to me that spiritual world opens to us in various ways. Certain phases of it may manifest itself to us because by nature from the start we may have a certain sensitive, or psychic, physical, or spiritual organism.

Sometimes it may open to us for a few minutes, and close again, or open and remain open, the opening coming unexplained, and, as it were, by accident. Jacob Boehme saw the sun reflected from a bright pan, did he not? Also it seems to me that opening may be secured gradually and certainly, never to leave us, not by accident, but in so orderly and sure a way under natural law that it is our full personal acquisition, gained with the clear understanding of the intellect, as our advances in natural science have been gained. I think it then comes line upon line, as we seek to fight our fight as truly as we may, now a subtle breath of the Spirit; then a whisper; each taking us a little farther on if we are earnest enough

and sensitive enough and wise enough to know the value of what is said to us, and take the leisure of soul to reflect upon it and make it fully ours. I do not wish to seem to be claiming too much for my own personal experience. It is the view of things systematized and completed by thought to which my observation and fragments of experience and insight lead me.

What you said of the sense of rhythm interested me very deeply, for a certain sense of terror before life, a fear of being unable to do enough and have enough power and have enough achieved in time to meet its demands, has been one of my greatest oppressions. In troubled dreams I dream again and again of

awaking tc a consciousness that I am hopelessly late to some absolutely essential engagement. The mad rush for efficiency in material things, the crack of the whip, impress me profoundly, though I meet such fears with a growing sense of power and glad understanding. For a long time that thought of rhythm, a keeping time to a spiritually heard, materially inaudible, harmony (this is a figure of speech, of course), has been present with me as the solution of the difficulty. Some years ago I was silly enough to seek to repair the neglect of certain elements in my earlier education, and at a rather late age, and rather imperfectly, I learned to dance. From that amusement, long ago abandoned, one remem-

brance of especial value I carry away with me is of a form of action not under the lash, nor ever straining to become faster and faster till strength fails and with no limit or goal ahead, but a form of action which is a glad fellowship with other people which is rest and joy, where every step is taken at the right time to a simple music which governs all, a form of action which excludes all nervous strain to go faster, because each motion and time is perfect, and to move faster would destroy the perfection.

"His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence and go into Judea. —Jesus saith unto them, My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready."

But as to the wonders which I be-

lieve are glad and beautiful beyond any conception of ours, and which are around us on every hand, I am not in any hurry for them to open to me too rapidly. For this also there is a time. I pray God that nothing may be opened to me that should not be opened and that nothing may be opened before the due time, but also that nothing that I should see may be hidden from me by my unfaithfulness or dullness of heart.

XII

A New and Glorious World *

I am of that set of persons who believe you are speaking the truth in

* Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly*. Owing to the address having been lost, it

"Twenty Minutes of Reality"—that you "saw into reality," and felt the ecstasy of its atmosphere—I believe, because I, too, have had several of those "rare and fleeting occasions" of which you write so well.

The first of these came when I was a child of eleven years. Mother had often talked with me about Jesus, so that I think I really loved him, but I did doubt a bit whether he loved me. I longed to know he did. One Sunday noon, after I had been speaking

has been impossible to secure the writer's permission to reprint this very beautiful letter. Should the author of it see it thus printed without her consent the author of *Twenty Minutes of Reality* earnestly hopes that she will forgive the liberty and believe that it would not have been taken could it have been avoided.

to him in my childish way, suddenly a great light seemed to burst upon me: not an external light—an inward light. I cannot put it in words as you can. It was a new and glorious world, a world of ineffable love and light which seemed to emanate from a Presence which I knew to be there but which I could not see. I thought it was Jesus. My little heart throbbed with ecstasy at what seemed to me his smile. My body seemed light and I felt as if walking on air. I had to tell some one my joy, and sought my oldest sister and said timidly, "I have found Jesus! I am so happy. It is all light now!"

This sort of inner glory lasted an hour or two, or till the middle of the afternoon service, when it vanished

as suddenly as it came and left me bewildered and desolate. I had to whisper to my sister then, for I could not wait for the end of the service. I said in my distress, "I've lost Him! It is all dark again. What *shall* I do?" I am eighty-one years old, but that vision and its ecstasy are so vivid in memory as had it opened on me to-day.

Several "Twenty Minutes of Reality" have come to me later in life. Once at a great crisis, a mental strain, accompanied with a humiliating sense of inability to act strongly, I had a sudden vision of a central self which almost overwhelmed me. It was a reservoir of new, unguessed powers, measureless capacities, and unfathomed emotions — a reservoir from

which I had never drawn because this present life offered neither time nor scope for what was there, and I involuntarily exclaimed, "Now, I *know* I am immortal! I am more than I dreamed I was!"

At another time of prolonged mental strain and perplexity I went one day to walk in the fields. All at once the strain ceased as would the pressure on a severed cord. I was flooded with an ineffable soul-light which seemed to radiate from a great Personality with whom I was in immediate touch. I felt it to be the touch of God. The ecstasy was beyond description—but you know it. I was passing through a patch of "beggar's grass," which you may know, with its wiry stems, ending in feathery heads.

Every head shone and glistened like pearls. I could hardly walk for the overwhelming sense of the Divine Presence, and its joy. I almost *saw* God.

A singular thing accompanied this experience. A little white dog, which was my companion, and which had walked discreetly by my side all the way, began to dance and frisk about me at this moment, barking and looking up at me as if I were holding up some tempting morsel for him to spring for. He evidently saw or felt something that excited him. Did he see the light on the beggar's grass, I wonder, or did he feel the vibrations of my ecstasy? Perhaps all created things are part of one great whole. Perhaps little brown sparrows, little

white dogs, internes, nurses, convalescing gentlemen, and old ladies are cosmic cousins, capable of a responsive family sympathy.

I have never spoken to any one of these wonderful and beautiful experiences, because I felt no one would understand. They were very vivid, but now that I have put them into words, they seem very colorless. Language is so blurring to any attempted picture of the deep things of the Spirit.

I feel that I ought to apologize because, having found one to understand, I have spoken. Yet, why should not spies who have seen the Promised Land compare their bunches of grapes on their return?

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